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Bonding moment: Garrison Keillor playfully imitates the hand gesture of Liz Sanka of Palm Springs during a one-on-one with the College of the Desert student on Tuesday evening in Indian Wells.

Words of wisdom from the heartland

Garrison Keillor entertains 1,800 in Indian Wells

BY NADIA T. VILLAGRÁN
THE DESERT SUN

INDIAN WELLS — Men and women, dressed in their finery, slapped their knees and howled their approval Tuesday in a tribute to true Midwest humor.

A crowd of about 1,800 laughed unabashed at the ad-libs of author and radio man Garrison Keillor, who told stories, sang verses and even quoted William Shakespeare.

The speech was part of the four-part Desert Town Hall Indian Wells — an annual event that brings renowned world speakers to the desert.

Keillor, an award-winning storyteller and comedian from Minnesota, offered his characteristic form of storytelling.

In the hour-long speech, Keillor jumped from story to story based in the Midwest, only lightly touching on the present world conflicts.

"It is an awesome moment in our history when comedians must tread very carefully because young Americans, young Iraqis, young Europeans are going to be asked to risk their lives," he said.

Instead Keillor's speech included a description of his home in St. Paul, Minn., — "I sit at the very top of the middle of the country."

Long time speaker-series attendee Sylvia Long

About the series

Desert Town Hall Indian Wells: The remaining speakers in the 2003 series include Fox News personality Bill O'Reilly, March 8, and former presidential adviser David Gergen, April 10. Tickets are still available for Gergen.

Information: 416-3400

A closer look

Q&A: Garrison Keillor talks about his life. **B4**

of Rancho Mirage said she enjoyed Keillor's speech because of its simple flow and humor.

"It was so different. It was amusing, it was light, it was kind of fun. We

need that now," she said.

Charles Roney, a teacher at Calvary Christian High School in Cathedral City, said Keillor's keen ability to create stories out of simple memories or different observations was something he would try to teach his students.

Keillor's throwback to old Midwestern living was not lost to the teens in the audience.

Shantee Lands, 15, of Calvary Christian High School in Cathedral City, said she gained a new awareness about storytelling.

"Even if you talk slow you can still get your point across," she said.

The event was held at the Renaissance Esmeralda Resort & Spa's new Emerald Ballroom.